

## **IPP TECHNICAL EVALUATION**

**US Partner:** Iowa State University, College of Business

**NIS Partner:** Nizhnii Novgorod State Agricultural Academy

**Location of Site Visit:** Nizhnii Novgorod

**Date of Visit:** 21-25 October 1996

**Date Submitted to IREX:** 15 December 1996

### **A) Discuss the strongest aspects of the technical and professional work being done by this partnership.**

The strongest aspects of this partnership are to be found in the people who comprise it, specifically Mr. Andrei Larichev of the Center for Continuing Education and his colleagues from the Iowa State University College of Business.

Mr. Larichev is the politically astute Director of the Center. He recognizes the need to not rely on just one source of funding for the Center, and is constantly on the lookout for new sources of support to boost the sustainability of his Center.

The professors from the Iowa State University College of Business are also playing an important role in the partnership. They take time out from their busy schedules and professional duties to travel to Russia to teach their specialties in a difficult and demanding environment.

The high level of cooperation between the Center and the Iowa State University College of Business is very impressive and could serve as a model for other programs.

### **Discuss the weakest aspects of the technical and professional work being done by this partnership.**

This is a strong partnership overall, although there is room for improvement in the following:

- a) The translations of materials should be checked by a native Russian speaker before being used in the classroom. The translations were done by students in the Russian program at Iowa and contained several mistakes which the interpreters corrected.

b) Professor Morris was under-utilized. He only taught one course for the Center, an elective. There was insufficient motivation therefore for the students to attend or to take to heart the subject matter being taught.

The presence of a professor on-site for a period of eight weeks or so adds a great deal to the program. It provides the students with an opportunity for increased interaction with American business experts, and could provide valuable experience to both students and professors alike.

The students benefit by being exposed to the requirements of a Western university level course of instruction, methods, systems, and structure. The students may then incorporate the knowledge acquired in the course into their future professional lives. The students also benefit from the fact that the course is of approximately two months duration, which allows for a detailed study of the subject matter.

The resident professor benefits by experiencing deeper immersion into the culture and daily life of his students. A long term residence also gives the professor the opportunity to gain a clearer and more personal understanding of the current conditions in Russia.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

Improvements to the partnership may be realized by:

- a) Improving the quality of the translations into Russian;
- b) Making the course(s) offered by visiting Iowa faculty a regular part of the curriculum, and by assigning tests and grades in the course(s); the visiting professors could also help with the English program as conversation partners if time allows and if the instructors wish;
- c) Increasing print and media advertising of the Center to showcase what the Center has to offer;
- d) Increasing participation of agribusiness professionals and private farmers in the courses offered. Increased participation by those who can ultimately pay for the services can only have a positive impact upon the eventual sustainability of the Center. This has already been started, as can be seen from the attached memorandum of cooperation between the Academy's veterinary professors and Iowa State University's College of Veterinary Studies.

### **B) What do the Russian and Ukrainian partners see as the “criteria for success” for their partnership project activities? How close are they to attaining them?**

The Russian partners consider the "criteria for success" for their continued activities contingent upon continued outside funding, as well as upon increasing the demand for the services offered by the Center. The Russian partners are actively seeking continued funding for the Center and its programs through a variety of channels.

The Center is currently examining the possibility of incorporating with the neighboring Federal Academic Center for Agrarian Business Development.

The following is taken from a trip report submitted by McKinney Russell and Stewart Chisholm to the ISU-NNSA Partnership on Nov. 5-6, 1996, which covers the subject of the incorporation of the two Centers:

A major organizational change may be in the works for this partnership. There are tentative plans underway for combining the ISU/NNSA CEC with the Federal Academic Center for Agrarian Business Development (FAC). The latter has been in existence for approximately two years as a division of the Regional Institute of Economics and Agricultural Administration (RIEAA). The FAC was established and run by Larichev, who technically remains the Director, but responsibilities for the day-to-day activities are being handled by his assistant, in light of Larichev's new role as the director of the CEC.

...The FAC has two main goals: to provide agribusiness retraining to local and regional government specialists and to aid in the development of the privatization of the agricultural sector in the Nizhnii-Novgorod oblast and surrounding regions. The training has been almost completely supported by government funds due to its close ties and agreements with the Ministry of Agriculture, although there has been sporadic funding from the IFC for some seminars. The FAC is technically part of the RIEAA (giving it the status of a "government institution"), meaning that it does not pay rent, and has neither a separate legal status nor a separate bank account from the RIEAA itself. However, due to the great number of training agreements between the FAC and the MOA, the profit margin has been fairly high, allowing the FAC to purchase furniture and a van and car for the RIEAA.

It is Larichev's plan to incorporate the two centers, so as to increase chances for the sustainability of the NNSAA center. There are still many questions as to what type of status the new organization would have. Larichev proposes that the FAC would be in effect incorporated into the CEC giving it the same legal status as a "non-commercial organization" and legally severing it from the RIEAA, although the space in the RIEAA would still be used. Larichev would then receive the new title of "Prorector for Professional Development Programs" at the NNSAA. This status would allow him to still receive funds to support this new center by routing them through the NNSAA since federal funds could not be directly transferred to the new center if it were no longer to be a government entity. Both the current spaces at the NNSAA and the RIEAA would be used for future training, with the space of the former serving as the main office for the combined centers.

The Center should also apply to various organizations and foundations for additional funds. These organizations and foundations include but are not limited to: the Soros and Eurasia Foundations, the World Bank, VOCA, Citizens Network, and others with similar missions in the NIS.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

The Center must continue its efforts to achieve sustainability by actively searching for alternate sources of funding. A possibility that may have been overlooked might be found in corporate sponsorship of seminars. For example, a bank might sponsor a seminar on business plans, or a chemical company might sponsor a crop production seminar.

The Center should increase advertising to attract more clientele to the Center. They should also broaden the base of participants to include more agribusiness professionals and private farmers. The inclusion of more agribusiness professionals and private farmers in the seminars will help improve the sustainability of the partnership by building a base of participants who can actually pay for the services provided. If the Center can attract enough participants like these, then it will be able to reduce its reliance on outside funding. Advertising should be targeted toward those farmers and agribusiness professionals by means of newspapers, agricultural publications, radio, and television. By making its staff available for interviews, the Center can promote its activities and receive free advertising at the same time. Another form of relatively inexpensive advertising is direct phone contact with prospective participants.

**C) Describe the technical merit and appropriateness of the following program components:**

**1. Training**

The training available at the Center for Continuing Education is of high quality. The seminar which was held on 21-24 October covered such topics as motivation, business planning, and management; it was well presented and relevant to the current situation in Russia.

A one day seminar for veterinary professionals, private farmers and farm directors was given by faculty of the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Studies, and was very well attended with approximately two hundred participants. The veterinary seminar was very popular. Many of the attendees expressed deep thanks and a desire for additional seminars of this type to be held in the future. Many of those present left with practical advice and ideas which they could implement in their own operations.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

The quality of the training sessions could be improved by lengthening the duration of the seminars. A one week seminar does not really provide the participants with ample time to fully assimilate all of the lessons that the visiting faculty may wish to impart. Full assimilation is very important as the participants are themselves teachers who must impart the lessons they learn to their students. Given the cultural and language barriers which must be overcome by the Iowa State professors, one week is insufficient to ensure that their lessons have been understood correctly by their Russian colleagues.

As far as the material is concerned, it is current, accurate, and relevant to the Russian situation.

The training sessions could be better marketed. An increase in the use of print and electronic media would spread knowledge of what the Center has to offer the Russian agribusiness and educational community. This may be achieved by contacting newspapers, professional magazines and journals, and regional radio and television stations to inform them about the Center's activities and to offer to do interviews.

An additional recommendation is to increase the number of seminars like the veterinary seminar, which directly target active farmers and agribusiness professionals.

## **2. Products**

The products created by this particular partnership (training materials, translations, audio/video/computer materials, etc.) are generally of high quality, except for the translations of the materials which the US professors brought with them from Iowa for the seminar.

Due to a lack of classroom computer equipment, opportunities for the participants of the seminars to familiarize themselves with operating computers are limited.

At the time of the site visit in October, the study guide was unfinished, although work was progressing. A mid- to late November completion date was expected.

The curricula from seminars #1, #2, and #3 ("Nalogi v sel'skokhoziastvennom predpriatii"; "Finansovaya otsenka sel'skokhoziastvennykh predpriatii"; and "Rukovodstvo, strategicheskie resheniya i proizvodstvennye vozmozhnosti sel'skokhoziastvennykh predpriatii", respectively), as well as the "Strategy and Management" and "Small Business" curricula are well done and relevant to the current Russian situation.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

As mentioned earlier, translations into Russian should be checked by a native Russian speaker to eliminate mistakes.

The materials should be checked and updated periodically to make sure that the latest information is included and available.

The availability of the product should be made known through increased advertising by former participants and through print and media advertising.

The Center should also explore possibilities of incorporating computer instruction into the seminars. By this I mean the introduction of computerized farm management programs, such as record keeping, production records, and feed formulation.

### **3. Resource and Learning Center**

The Continuing Education Center at the Nizhnii Novgorod State Agricultural Academy is a well equipped source of Western business and agricultural information. The Center boasts several computers, a copier, an overhead, and e-mail facilities. There are copies of previous seminars available for perusal as well as video records of some seminars. The staff is willing and able to provide assistance to interested parties.

#### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

The Center can be improved by actively promoting the availability of its resources as well as by increasing the availability of the Center's consulting services. The utilization of regional print and media sources for increased advertising should be attempted.

#### **D) What additional technical assistance do you believe the Russian or Ukrainian side could use to improve their work in general?**

Further technical assistance in the form of audio/video equipment might lead to a general increase in efficiency. Additional equipment such as overhead projectors would lead to a decrease in scheduling conflicts caused by lack of equipment.

#### **E) What new directions do you see as a natural follow-on for this project? Are there others working in the sector that this group might contact and/or collaborate with?**

A natural follow-on to this project would be to increase the number of seminars available to actual agricultural producers and processors.

Another possible follow-on to this project could lie in acquiring corporate sponsorship for some of the seminars targeted to large scale producers and small farmers. Banks, chemical companies, or other firms might be willing to sponsor financial or crop production seminars in exchange for the advertising and possible customers this would attract.

#### **F) How do you assess the partnership's sustainability plan? What is your sense of how close the partners will be to meeting these goals?**

The sustainability plan of this partnership contains real potential. The Director of the Center is actively seeking alternative funds and methods to ensure the continuation of the Center. He is establishing contacts with other organizations and foundations in order to find additional sources of financial and technical aid. He is also seeking ways to make the

Center more self-financing through consulting services and paid seminars; this is a more long term project, given the state of the Russian economy. The Center for Continuing Education is relatively close to achieving its goals for continuing sustainability, and they should be realized in the not too distant future.

**G) Other comments:**

The Nizhnii Novgorod Center for Continuing Education, in partnership with the Iowa State University College of Business, is one of the better partnerships of its kind. Despite the inherent difficulties in a program which "trains trainers", this team is making progress thanks to the dedication of both partners.

From the standpoint of the private farmers however, more needs to be done to include them in the training programs. All of the farmers I spoke with desired direct contact with Western professionals, especially with Americans. They do not yet fully trust the competence of their own trainers and wish to receive the information direct from the source. A reduction in the number of middlemen reduces the risk of distortion or mistakes in the transfer of knowledge and also results in an increase of efficiency. Many of these farmers are also willing to pay for knowledge they find useful. This can only have a positive impact upon the eventual sustainability of the Center.